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DOCUMENTS

1. *The New England Emigrant Aid Company and English Cotton Supply Associations: Letters of Frederick L. Olmsted, 1857*

THE following letters reveal an attempt made in 1857 by the New England Emigrant Aid Company to enlist the aid of English cotton manufacturers in colonizing free laborers upon new land in the southwest of the United States. The work of this society in assisting the establishment of free communities in Kansas is well known. In encouraging emigrants, furnishing them with advice and helping to defray their travelling expenses, and finally by supplying the new communities with the necessary outfit of capital in the form of sawmills, grist-mills, etc., the Emigrant Aid Company combated the further advance of slavery with an intelligent policy of practical opportunism. Its business-like methods and adherence to lawful means still stand out in marked contrast to the violent denunciations and revolutionary propaganda which characterized much of the anti-slavery movement.

To have enlisted the services of Frederick Law Olmsted is the best sort of proof that the leaders of the Emigrant Aid Company were really anxious to learn the truth about slavery, for by the publication of his *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* in 1856 and the *Journey through Texas* in 1857 Mr. Olmsted had shown himself to be the best-informed and the most unprejudiced and thoughtful student of slave society in this country.

The plan which Mr. Olmsted submitted to the Cotton Supply Associations of Manchester and Liverpool was based upon two clear and important convictions: (1) that cotton could be successfully grown almost anywhere in the South by white labor, and (2) that free white labor could in the long run hold its ground against the slave-using planters in competition for the land.¹ The success of

¹ The first point was elaborated in Olmsted's *Journey in the Back Country*, pp. 337-355. The soundness of the contention has been amply demonstrated by the later history of Southern agriculture, especially in Texas.

On the second point there was ground for a difference of opinion. Would the new colonists be any more able to hold their land against the competition of the large planters using slave gangs than were the small farmers of the South Atlantic states who in earlier decades had been driven on to poorer soils and to the new Southwest? Much would undoubtedly have depended on the character

the colonization plan in not only checking the further advance, but in hastening the eventual disappearance of slavery would have depended upon another circumstance, also, which Mr. Olmsted does not seem to have recognized. Slavery depended for its profitability on a constantly available supply of new land. As soon as the rapidly decreasing supply of fresh lands suitable for cotton cultivation had been exhausted, the economic weakness of the slave system would have been sure to display itself and eventually its political support would have failed. Thus, in planning to seize this new land in advance by free-labor colonists, the Emigrant Aid Company were preparing, perhaps more scientifically than they themselves realized, to hasten the inevitable decay of the "peculiar institution" of the South.

Dr. Samuel Cabot, to whom this correspondence was addressed, was a physician of considerable reputation in Boston, one of the twenty original directors of the Emigrant Aid Company and an untiring worker in its service.

PERCY W. BIDWELL.

I.

NEW HAVEN, July 26th, 1857.
(Morris Cove)

DR. S. CABOT, JR.
(N. E. E. A. Soc'y)

Dear Sir

I extremely regret the circumstance which so long delayed my receipt of your letter of 16th July, to which I now reply.

Enclosed I send you a copy of the draft of a communication addressed by me on the 6th July, severally, to the Cotton Supply Associations of Manchester, and of Liverpool.² These papers were taken out and would be delivered in person to the Secretary's of the associations, by Mr. William Neill, one of our largest Cotton merchants, dealing with Manchester, and the editor of a weekly Cotton circular, much quoted by the English journals. Mr. Neill sail'd from New York on the 8th. You will perceive that my object has been thus far to secure a proper consideration of the subject, and that in these papers I have treated it simply in the Cotton Supply aspect. By the same mail however I addressed letters to individuals, with whom I have had a little correspondence previously, treating of the political and moral bearings of the project, stating the general principles on which I thought it would be best to proceed; fortifying my suggestions and statements with documents and in two instances—to Lord Goderich M. P. from the West of the new settlers and upon the amount of aid and direction furnished by the Emigrant Aid Company. It must also be remembered that these colonists would have settled on the last frontier of the cotton area and consequently would have been more reluctant to sell out than the earlier competitors of the planters.

² These local associations or branches had been formed but a little time before this. The Cotton Supply Association of Great Britain held its first annual meeting in April, 1858.

Riding and C. Fowler Buxton M. P.³ who has much influence in Manchester, requesting that the proposal of my letters to the Cotton Associations meet with due consideration. I addressed a short note also, (continuing a conversation I had last autumn on the agricultural capabilities of the United States,) to the editor of the *Times*. Colonel Hamilton, who has the most encouraging view of the project, promised me to write to Lord Stanley⁴ and friends at Liverpool by the following steamer's mail.

I trust that what has been thus done (previous to my receiving any intimation that you had thought of soliciting money in England) will have prepared the ground favorably to Mr. Paddleford's arrival. It is a most fortunate circumstance that a competent person will be present to meet objections and take advantage of various circumstances in the discussion, if one should occur, in which facts, likely to be familiar to Mr. P., will tell happily.

With regard to the proposal to be made by Mr. Paddleford, if any, and the information most desirable to be furnished, he will of course be guided by circumstances, but unless met with much greater favor than I can anticipate, I may venture to say that I am confident in the judgment that it would not be best to urge much more at present than careful enquiry, in some such manner as I have done in my letters. We shall find, I apprehend, a strong influence against us in East India and other colonial interests, and also in a narrow patriotism. From Lord Goderich's letter to me, I am sure that the American political relations of the project should be kept out of sight as much as possible in England. The name of the N. E. E. Aid Society should not at present be mentioned, because the Society has a certain political notoriety and English gentlemen will generally feel it to be their duty, not to listen to a proposal which seems likely to connect their names with the internal political affairs of a foreign government. This is not only somewhat reasonable but with the class represented by the *Times*, it happens now to be a fashion. They may be drawn into it gradually, as they gain knowledge of the true character of the society, perhaps, but the dread of lending their aid even indirectly to what might turn out to be a merely political scheme (in the narrow sense), would be likely to prevent their giving the subject a fair hearing. Everybody knows who has had to do with Englishmen, that it is peculiarly true of them, that it is the first step which costs. The great point at first is to get them to listen. If they will go so far this autumn as to send out an agent to obtain information, I shall feel quite sure of our leading them from that to the most valuable co-operation. . . .⁵

³ George Frederick Robinson (1827-1909, at this time known by the courtesy title of Lord Goderich) was afterward Earl de Grey and Ripon and first Marquis of Ripon. On March 30, 1857, he had been elected to succeed Cobden as M. P. for the West Riding of Yorkshire. Charles Buxton (1823-1871), son of Sir Thomas *Fowell* Buxton, was returned to the House of Commons for Newport in 1857.

⁴ Lord Stanley (1826-1893), eldest son of the fourteenth Earl of Derby and afterward fifteenth earl and cabinet minister, was from 1848 to 1859 M. P. for King's Lynn.

⁵ Here follows a criticism of the work of an English traveller, Robert Russell (*North America, its Agriculture and Climate*, Edinburgh, 1857), which Olmsted feared might exert an unfavorable influence on the English attitude toward

I enclose papers put into my hands last night by Mr. Kapp⁶ which must be used with discretion. I promised to return them in course of the week. They contain offers to sell lands of the choicest unimproved character in the vicinity of the northernmost German settlements of Texas and precisely in the line we wish to occupy and evidently at unusually low prices. I think some encouragement should be offered to the owners, who are Scotchmen—the *merchants* mentioned in my book at N. Braunfels, who bought the free-labor cotton.⁷ I know that they have made their land investments with great care. I have another offer of choice, selected lands in the same region and to the northward of it, 20,000 acres at 90 cts an acre. Another of 2000 acres same district, selected lots at 50 cts. or one half in alternate lots, for nothing, on condition of occupation within three years: another of 2 leagues in the Brazos, Milan County (6000 acres) \$1.50 an acre, another on the Nueces 35 miles north of Corpus Christi, 20,000 acres, in one body, at \$1.00 an acre. Large tracts of cotton land can be best got, however, by dealing with the R. R. companies.

I am obliged to close suddenly and will probably write further by next mail

Yours Respectfully

FRED. LAW OLMSTED.

Copy.

II.

NEW YORK, July 6th, 1857.

TO THE SECRETARY OF THE
COTTON SUPPLY ASSOCIATION

Sir

My attention having been directed for some years past to the cotton producing regions of the *North American Continent*, I take leave to present certain views I have formed for the consideration of your association.

Under the stimulus of high prices, valuable contributions of cotton are obtained from various other parts of the world than the *United States*; measures may be taken by which this auxilliary supply will be much increased. After much research and several costly experiments however, it yet remains very questionable if any where else in the world, an equal value of cotton-wool can be obtained from a given expenditure of labor, as in that part of the *N. A. Continent* lying between the thirtieth and the thirty sixth parallels of latitude. No where else are the same meteorological conditions found which here prevail, nor is [it] to be expected that by any exercise of human ingenuity they will be obtained.

The amount of labor engaged in the production of cotton within the region thus favored does not exceed that of one strong man to a square mile. If one half the agricultural population of *Europe* was the colonization scheme. He also sketches his plans for a third volume of the series *Our Slave States*, which appeared in 1860 under the title, *A Journey in the Back Country*.

⁶ Friedrich Kapp (1824-1884), the well-known writer on slavery and on the German element in America. Olmsted's account of the history of New Braunfels, in his *Journey through Texas*, pp. 172-177, is based on a published lecture by his friend Kapp.

⁷ *A Journey through Texas* (New York, 1857), p. 146. On New Braunfels, see G. G. Benjamin, *The Germans in Texas* (Philadelphia, 1909), pp. 44-54.

transferred to this region it would not be at all densely populated and the laborers would probably be better paid in producing cotton at $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. a pound, than they are at present. An adequate supply of labor only is needed to increase the supply of Cotton from *North America*, tenfold. It is for the interest of those whose capital is invested in Slaves that the impression should prevail that the cultivation of cotton is impracticable by means of any other than negro slave labor, a monopoly of supplying which in the *United States* they enjoy. After extended and exact inquiry, having spent a summer in the cotton districts for the purpose, I am certain that this is not the case. There are exceptional, malarious and pestilential regions but in the largest part of the present Cotton producing region of the *United States* the labor of men of the *English* or Teutonic races will produce more cotton, man for man, in a life time, than of those of the *African* race.

I would suggest to your association therefore, that inquiry be made with regard to the practicability of increasing the supply of cotton by inducing free laborers to engage in its cultivation in the *South Western* territories of the *United States*. There are here vast tracts of suitable soil, as yet unoccupied by planters, and in which the political and social circumstances that prevent the introduction of free laborers elsewhere, exist if at all, in a very limited degree.

Three years ago the *Governor* of the *State of Texas*⁸ told me that the cotton crop of the *United States* might be doubled on the land as yet unoccupied in that state alone. There are millions of acres of this land in the vicinity of which *Slavery* does not exist in a form to prevent their occupation by free labor. There is nothing in the laws, nor, under discreet direction, need there be anything in the prejudices of the people, to prevent free settlers occupying this land. Large tracts of it can be procured at from two to six shillings (sterling) an acre. If a large free emigration were directed to them they would rapidly increase in value several hundred per cent. This increase in value would prevent the subsequent immigration of *Slave-holders* upon them. In *Comal County* in *Texas* within the last ten years, three thousand Germans have settled.⁹ Since they have been well established as a community, no slave proprietor has settled among them and such as were previously settled in the vicinity have been induced to employ free-laborers in occupations for which they would otherwise have purchased more Slaves. The Germans were thus engaged in the cultivation of cotton, and in one year, they produced, without previous experience or the usual conveniences, 800 bales, which I was informed, by the Merchant who purchased it, was superior in quality to any slave grown cotton he had ever seen.

Some further information on this subject may be gathered from my narrative of a *Journey in Texas*, a copy of which I take leave to send you by my friend *Mr. William Neill* of the house of *Neill Brothers and Company*, Cotton Merchants, to whom I have also communicated more fully my views of the measures which might be taken to increase the supply of cotton from the *United States*.

If your association should be disposed to prosecute the enquiry I have suggested I would gladly give any assistance in my power—coming

⁸ Elisha M. Pease, governor from 1853 to 1857.

⁹ See *Journey through Texas*, p. 428, "in Comal, Gillespie, and Medina counties nearly all the inhabitants are Germans".